

Menopause in the Workplace

Policy & Guidance for Staff and Managers

1 Introduction

The University recognises that approximately one third of our community of women may be experiencing symptoms of peri-menopause or menopause. This is a natural part of the aging process and it affects women in different ways. As a socially progressive employer, we wish to provide a range of appropriate support mechanisms to reflect this.

Symptoms associated with the menopause include hot flushes, palpitations, night sweats, sleep disturbance, fatigue, poor concentration / memory, irritability, mood disturbance, depression and anxiety, skin irritation and dryness. Some existing conditions may be exacerbated by the onset of the menopause. Overall, this period of hormonal change and associated symptoms can last from four to eight years.

It is recognised that some symptoms can affect performance at work; some women also believe that it has a negative impact on their managers and colleagues' perceptions of their competence at work. Trying to manage symptoms in the workplace without support can also lead to increased levels of stress.

This policy has been formulated based on the ACAS guidance in relation to Menopause at Work.

2 Policy Statement

As a people-oriented employer, the University is taking a proactive stance to support women through the menopause. In so-doing we aim to ensure that affected staff:

- are able to ask for confidential support and adjustments so they can continue to be successful in their roles.
- are better placed to manage their symptoms in the workplace.
- reaffirm our commitment to assuring women that we are committed to supporting their needs during this transitional stage of their lives.

We also wish others to consider how they can support colleagues going through the menopause.

3 Policy Scope

This policy applies to all staff and specifically women going through the menopause, trans men and women who may suffer actual or pseudo menopausal symptoms as a result of treatment or treatment interruptions, intersex and non-binary people and also carers, spouses and partners of women going through the menopause who may be seeking support for issues they experience at home.

4 Definitions

Menopause: when a woman ceases menstruation for 12 consecutive months. Typically occurring between the ages of 45-55, it is a natural part of the aging process for women. For some women this can happen earlier in life for example due to an auto-immune disease or cancer treatment.

Peri-menopause: the transition period leading up to the menopause during which women may experience symptoms due to fluctuating hormones.

Around 1 in 100 women experience the menopause before 40; this is known as premature menopause. This can occur naturally or because of some cancer treatments or a hysterectomy.

Post menopause: the time after menopause has occurred.

5 Key Principles

- We recognise our role in supporting women during this stage of life and that at times it can be a challenging transition.
- Staff who are experiencing symptoms at work relating to the menopause are encouraged to discuss their needs with their manager if they feel able to do so.
- Some women are not comfortable discussing such issues with their manager, but they may contact the HR Directorate or Occupational Health for a confidential discussion in the first instance.
- Any discussions that take place must be treated sensitively and confidentially and not be disclosed without the express permission of the staff member unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- We wish to support women experiencing menopause related symptoms at work, and will accommodate reasonable adjustments to the working environment and working patterns where it is possible to do so.
- We also recognise that partners and spouses as well as other family members may benefit from help and support in dealing with this issue.
- Additional advice and support is available from Occupational Health where required.

6 Challenges women experience

The menopause is a natural process for women and for some the positive benefits outweigh the negative. Not all women have the same symptoms but, for those who do, the challenges presented by symptoms can impact in the workplace. For example: -

- Changes that can impact upon self-esteem and confidence – weight gain, hair loss

- Symptoms that can affect performance – loss of concentration and memory, fatigue
- Muscle pain and stiffness than can impact movement and physical capability
- Fear of stigma, embarrassment
- Psychological symptoms, low mood, anxiety and stress and sometimes the overall emotional impact of the menopause.

7 Support for partners and/or family members

Partners and others may also experience difficulties during this time. Couples in same sex relationships may have additional difficulties if they are also going through menopause at the same time as their partner. Spouses and partners may experience difficulties in their relationships as a result of menopausal symptoms and this in turn may impact on their work and performance.

8 Support from Managers

Each situation is different and there is no single approach to supporting women at work. As with any potentially longstanding health-related condition, sympathetic and appropriate support from managers is crucial to meeting the needs of women experiencing challenges from the menopause. Above all, whilst recognising that some women may not wish to discuss the menopause, it is important to offer a conversation and to respond sympathetically to any requests for adjustments at work.

Some possible support or adjustments which it may be appropriate to discuss include: -

- Flexibility in working arrangements for those experience debilitating symptoms. Where the role permits, agile working can be a key method of enabling staff to modify their working arrangements and place of work to help them better manage symptoms. For example, some women experiencing the menopause will find that they have times of the day where symptoms are more or less problematic and start and finish times could be adjusted to take this into account. Those who suffer from disturbed or disrupted sleep patterns may find they are more productive with a later start time and correspondingly later finishing time.
- Review of allocation of work and responsibilities if symptoms are negatively affecting performance. For example, allowing more time to complete a training course so that it can be rearranged for a time when the employee feels more able to undertake the training.
- Flexibility around the taking of breaks or increased shorter breaks during the working day.
- Flexibility around attending relevant medical appointments.
- Where uniforms are provided, where possible provide additional uniforms to ensure it is possible to change during the day.
- Facilitating a more comfortable working environment, taking into account temperature and lighting, to help women manage their body temperature. Make desk fans easily available and consider if ventilation is sufficient or can be improved through moving from one area of the office to another.

9 Manager Responsibilities

Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring that no one experiences less favourable treatment as a result of the menopause.
- Ensuring that any conversations are kept strictly confidential.
- Putting in place any agreed actions/adjustments that support ongoing conditions related to the menopause
- Confirming in writing any agreements made.
- Holding regular dialogue with the member of staff regarding support required, including follow up meetings to review adjustments that have been made.
- Seeking additional advice from Occupational Health where necessary.
- Signposting relevant sources of support, such as the [Employee Assistance Programme](#), [the Occupational Health Service](#) and [HR](#).
- Agreeing with the member of staff if other colleagues should be informed about any adjustments that have been agreed (even if the reason is not disclosed).

Managers should also refer to [Menopause - Guidance for Managers](#) for additional guidance and information or their HR team where necessary.

10 Self-Managing Symptoms

If you are experiencing the menopause the University would encourage you to seek support if you feel that you require it. You can confidentially self-refer to our Occupational Health team or talk to HR or your line manager.

There are a number of positive steps you can take to help alleviate symptoms. Consider:

- Seeking medical advice from your GP or nurse at your doctor's surgery.
- Discussing symptoms with your manager or the alternative contacts (see above) and how they can help you.
- Contacting the [Employee Assistance Programme](#).
- Whether healthier lifestyle choices (see Appendix A) could help with some of the symptoms.

11 Additional Support

NHS information

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause/>

NICE guidelines on 'Menopause: diagnosis and treatment'

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information>

Menopause Matters

<https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>

Women's Health Concern

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/>

Daisy Network – Information on POI (Premature Ovarian Insufficiency)

<https://www.daisynetwork.org>

The Menopause Exchange

<https://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk>

NewLifeOutlook | Menopause – a US site with useful tips and recipes

<https://menopause.newlifeoutlook.com/>

Menopause Matters, menopausal symptoms, remedies, advice – an award winning UK site with helpful resources

<https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/index.php>

Appendix A

Lifestyle Choices

Some lifestyle choices may help alleviate symptoms of the menopause.

- Eat healthily and regularly – research has shown that a balanced diet can help in alleviating some symptoms, in keeping bones healthy and in reducing weight gain.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Exercise regularly - to reduce hot flushes, improve sleep, boost mood and maintain aerobic fitness levels.
- Weight training builds core strength and muscle mass and helps protect your bones.
- Not smoking – to help reduce hot flushes and the risk of developing serious conditions such as cancer, heart disease and stroke.
- Keep your alcohol intake within recommended levels and cut down on caffeine and spicy food – all of which can trigger hot flushes.
- Having access to natural light whenever possible go for a walk during breaks or at quiet times of the day.
- Stay cool at night – wearing loose clothes in a cool and well-ventilated room to help with hot flushes and night sweats.
- Ensuring adequate rest and relaxation – to reduce stress levels and improve mood (through, for example, activities such as mindfulness, yoga and tai chi).